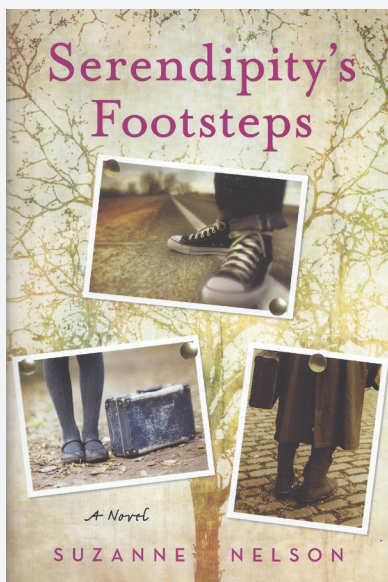


**First Opinion: History, Secrets, and Shoes:  
Sole Connections in *Serendipity's Footsteps***

Nelson, Suzanne. *Serendipity's Footsteps*. New York: Knopf, 2015. Print.

Melanie Hundley



*Shoes are the keepers of secrets. They hold pieces of history captive in their soles (unpaged).*

Shoes play an interesting, magical role in many myths, fairy tales, and young adult novels. From Cinderella and her glass slippers to Dorothy and her ruby slippers, we see stories where shoes are the keepers of magic; they transform the wearer into someone else. Harry Potter finds a portkey in an old boot (Rowling chapter 6) and Percy Jackson has winged baseball shoes (Riordan chapter 10); for these characters, shoes are the tool that moves them rapidly from one place to another. Examples of the magical, transformative, and even dangerous power of shoes occur frequently in the stories we tell as a society. Shoes are both art and necessity; we see advertisements with athletic shoes that promise the perfect fit to help us run longer and jump higher. The right shoe can make an event magical and make the perfect dress more perfect. Indeed, Dalya looks at a pair of shoes and knows that “someday, when she found a young man worthy of the shoes, she would wear them for him on their wedding day” (Nelson 10).

*Serendipity's Footsteps* is a story about shoes, family, and hope. Dalya, the daughter of cobblers in 1940's Berlin, has just finished building her first pair of shoes when her family's shop is invaded by Nazi soldiers. The shoes Dalya designed and built have a secret compartment in

the heels, where she hides her mother's wedding rings and a Hebrew prayer. She hides these shoes, pale pink with fancy embroidery and the perfect heel, in a secret compartment in the wall as she and her family are dragged into the streets and onto a train headed to a concentration camp. Dalya draws pictures of shoes on the walls of the concentration camp and tells her younger sister stories of magical shoes. Dalya, the last surviving member of her family, eventually escapes the concentration camp and ends up with a wealthy family in New York. An American soldier finds Dalya's shoes in the rubble of the shop in Berlin and recognizes the beauty and artistry of them. He takes them home to his fiancée, who wears them at her wedding. The shoes become part of the fairy tale story about their relationship.

Ray, an orphan in Texas, once loved to run. Music and running in her bright pink tennis shoes were her things, things that she thought couldn't be taken away from her as she moved from foster home to foster home. A fire at one of the foster homes damages the bottom of her feet and she can no longer run. She ends up in a different foster home in Texas, bitter and angry. She is still able to play and sing, but she can't run. She finds a beautiful pair of pink shoes with embroidery in a thrift shop and steals them so that she has shoes to wear to a school dance. A series of misunderstandings cause Ray to run away to New York, but not before she throws the pink shoes away. She dreams of going to Juilliard in New York City.

Pinny, another orphan in the foster home where Ray lives, rescues the shoes and hides them in her backpack. Pinny has Down syndrome and, at twenty-one years old, realizes that other people are making decisions for her life without asking what she wants. Pinny's mother, an actress in New York, abandoned her when Pinny was very young. From her mother, Pinny learned that shoes were magical and that the right shoe could make your day better. Thus, Pinny carries a Polaroid camera with her everywhere, taking pictures of people's shoes. She finds an article about the Tree of Lost Soles in New York and sees her mother's shoes in the branches. When Ray runs away, Pinny follows her because she believes Ray can help her get to New York so she can find her mother. Pinny talks about how important it is for people to find their More, or the thing that makes life special and magical.

Dalya, Ray, and Pinny suffer a great deal in their lives; both Dalya and Pinny manage to retain hope in the future, while Ray holds on to her anger and bitterness. It is only as Ray realizes that she wants to be More, to be special and kind, that she discovers the magic of hope and believing. As the three stories weave together, we see the ways in which fate and accidental meetings can shape and change lives. The pink shoes provide a connection between the stories and stand as a keeper of the history of these women. The pink shoes "full of so many people's secrets and memories" (346), like those in myths and fairy tales, provide a tool for transformation, finding your More, and finding your way home.

### **Works Cited**

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### **About the Author**

**Melanie Hundley**, a 2007 graduate of the University of Georgia, is an associate professor in the practice at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. She teaches young adult literature and writing methods courses. She is passionate about young adult literature and getting books into the hands of kids. Hundley also coordinates Patterson RAPS (Read and Play Saturdays), a reading program for middle school students at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College.